DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 056 705 LI 003 214

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TITLE A Librarian Plans a Library.
INSTITUTION Library Association, London (England). Branch and Mobile Libraries Group.
REPORT NO Occas-Pap-2
PUB DATE Feb 71
NOTE 17p.; (7 References); Based on a paper presented at a joint meeting of South-Western Branch & Branch & Mobile Libraries Group, Library Association, Stroud Library, 14 October 1970
AVAILABLE FROM Hon. Publications Officer, County Branch Library, West Walk, Yate, Bristol, England ($.65)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Branch Libraries; Foreign Countries; *Library Facilities; *Library Planning
IDENTIFIERS *Great Britain

ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is on small branch libraries of a public library that provide book service. The topics cover: (1) management, (2) resources, (3) library planning, (4) layouts, (5) site selection and (6) briefs or schedule of requirements. (MM)

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A LIBRARIAN PLANS A LIBRARY

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Based on a paper presented at a joint meeting of the South-Western Branch and the Branch and Mobile Libraries Group of the Library Association, at Stroud Library, on 14th October 1970.

Occasional papers number two

Published by the Branch and Mobile Libraries Group of the Library Association.

February 1971 Price 25p (5/-)

A LIBRARIAN PLANS A LIBRARY

The planning of libraries is like building castles in the air; something which gives delightful scope to the imagination and which, by a snug fireside on a winter's night, when our most ordinary ideas seem particularly splendid, is all so easy. To quote Cunninghame Graham "Your castles in the air are the best castles to possess, and keep a quiet mind. In them no taxes, no housemaids, no men-at-arms, no larders bother and no slavery of property exists".

I can only speak about small branch libraries of a public library service if we are to enter the world of reality, because apart from the new Headquarters, these are the only kinds of libraries which the small towns of this verdant county of Gloucestershire are financially able to support.

I can only speak in the context of libraries as the providers of a book service. This does not mean that there is any feeling against extension work and all that this implies. It means that the geographical spread of the county is so great, and the numbers of small communities in the county for which there is no adequate book provision is so large, that we need to spread our resources over a considerable area.

We have tried to avoid temporary building so far, believing that this is not a particularly economic solution of problems, since it only defers; but we have experimented with SCOLA (Second Consortium of Local Authorities) and found that the savings resulting from this system were relatively insignificant.

At the recent Public Libraries Conference at Eastbourne, we heard about the Coming Cultural Explosion and about the Arts Council's wish to promote "The civilised pursuits of a civilised country", which being interpreted apparently means the provision of film libraries, tapes, picture-loans, concerts and more and larger theatres within the Library complex. This is relevant in those libraries which, like Luton and Birmingham, have large and expensive new buildings erected or

about to go up, and assumes that these libraries have already solved the problems of adequate book supply. In the rural areas, we still have to lay the foundation stones of book service and, although we may hope that our branch libraries will quite naturally grow into centres of small town cultural activity, we have first to try to implement the statutory requirements of the Public Library Act.

In our present difficult financial situation I sometimes feel like the Member of Parliament who addressed the Speaker, Dr. Horace King in the following terms: "Sir, there is a grave cement shortage, nevertheless I demand concrete proposals ....."

Post-war building for counties is a relatively new exercise, covering the past eleven or twelve years and for this there are no agreed standards. IFLA standards (International Federation of Library Association) are referred to and extracts reprinted at the back of the Bourdillon Working Party Report 1962, with the following comment: "We doubt whether any standards of general applicability can usefully be laid down, except perhaps strictly as minimum standards for libraries serving populations over say 65,000", and again "We may consider that it may be reasonable to build on a more limited scale than that recommended, when a library is being provided for the first time, so long as provision is made for future extension". IFLA is not really interested in small libraries.

In 1960 the Library Association publicised the IFLA standards in a booklet called "Public Library Buildings, the way ahead", but if Bourdillon thought them ambitious, so also would an authority like Gloucestershire where money is far to seek and only found in the library service by very careful housekeeping. I understand that IFLA standards are likely to be reviewed in the near future.

We start, therefore, without any generally

accepted professional guidance.

Management

A librarian must be a bookman, but when he is planning a building he is a manager and will need to analyse in management terms.

1) he will need to assess his resources. What is the outlay that he can hope financially will be at his disposal, next year and in the near future?

2) he will need to analyse his requirements. Where is the most urgent need, what are his priorities? This may involve listing in order - making a skeleton building programme.

3) he will need to look critically at each place on this list and define his objectives. What kind of library should be built in this place? -

- a one-room branch

- an area or district branch with Mobile Service attached

- a library with separate departments?

4) This leads to the fourth big question, for whom is this library to be built and for how many?

On the plans you will see -

1. a typical small part-time branch layout, all services in one room -

Notice -

(a) the entrance gives access to a central part of the building.

(b) counter is close to the door.

(c) the workroom feeds the counter

(d) the staffroom is out of the line of circulation

(e) the delivery door feeds the workroom.

2. a typical branch with separate departments such as we have at Stroud.

(a) counter hall to reduce noise in the departments

(b) the workroom feeds the discharge counter

there is a separate enquiry desk

there is a smaller "out counter"

(c) the Adult Lending Library gives access to the reference library

(d) the Children's Library gives access to the Children's Study

the partitions between Childr n's and Adult Lending Department are not permanent and can be removed if this is needed later on. This could happen at Stroud in phase 3 of the proposed development

(e) this arrangement assumes that Senior Staff are available to take charge of the departments.

Estimating the population that will use a branch library is not an exact science and never will be, as long as new housing areas suddenly appear where green fields were before. Nevertheless, there are guide-lines and these should be carefully studied. The Census returns provide some figures, but these soon become out-of-date; the Registrar General's estimates are a more up-to-date guide and the Planning Authority will have foreknowledge of the expected rate of population growth. But the population which a Branch Library serves does not always

correspond tidily with a borough or urba. district. If the centre has good shops, the frontiers will be frequently crossed by residents from other areas and the library must be prepared to serve them too.

This was the case in Stroud where the residents in the rural district come naturally for work and shops. To estimate population use in Stroud it was decided to add half the population figure for the rural district to the Urban district figure and calculate from that. The answer came approximately to a 12,000 membership which in effect is close to the actual. Current estimating is vital if the evils of under-building or over-building are to be avoided. In these days one can hardly justify building for many years ahead, but it would be wrong not to provide for future extension.

When the estimated readership is known, then the Manager can return to questions 1 (his resources), 2 (his priorities), and 3 (his accommodation needs). He will reckon the floor space, which can be justified financially. He can decide what separate departments, if any, the floor space can contain. He is ready to compile the Schedule of Requirement or the Brief.

Site Hunting

Before discussing the brief I would like to say a word about site hunting. For a small branch the objective is ½ - ¾ acre not on the main highway, where there is noise and dirt from traffic, but nevertheless close to the shopping area. If it is not flat and fairly clear, expense will be incurred in site clearance and "abnormals". If it is not fairly near an adequate public carpark, planning requirements for library carparking may be costly too. To find a site which will satisfy the Planning Authority, and which can be acquired by the County Valuer at a price which is acceptable to all parties concerned can take years. Only experience of all the hurdles that have to be passed, will reconcile the impatient to the inevitable fact that in certain difficult areas, many years of patient negotiation are the

essential prelude to acquiring a library site or building.

Luck and misfortune play their part. In one country town we waited ten years for a building to come up for auction, and on auction day wondered whether bids would range within our limits. The private house on a proposed extension site can suddenly come on to the market, and we have to be ready to negotiate. Sometimes the planning authority can reserve sites for public buildings and when general development takes place, the library site is acquired at the same time as sites for Clinics, Police Stations, or Fire Stations.

To finance site purchase, government loan sanction is needed and the inability of the Department of Education and Science this year to permit local authorities to raise loans has added an extra sense of frustration. After years of patient negotiation to find that agreement coincides with a period of financial stringency, and that the money is then not going to be available is enough to break the stoutest spirit. This is the situation in which many counties have found themselves this summer. Government control on public library building is similarly exercised by loan sanction, and this comes at a late stage in the proceedings. The authority will have approved both the new library and the expenditure and the scheme will be at building tender stage when the plans are submitted to the Department of Education and Science for loan sanction approval. The Department now lays down a figure £7 per sq. ft. as an approved figure for costing, but if approval is deferred or declined, the inconvenience which can result locally can be serious. In School building there are agreed programmes which provide for the planning ahead which every sizeable authority needs for smooth working. In the library world, every year we pursue our building projects like the Snark with forks and hope. Whether we shall ever persuade the Department to work with us on more forward planning I do not know. Local government reform has proposed greater freedom for unitary authorities and perhaps forward planning will come best in this way.

Briefs or Schedule of Requirements.

The purpose of a brief is to convey to the Architect appointed to design the building, a clear picture of the ends to be served. He does not want the Client's solutions. He wants to know the Client's problems. In skeleton I suggest the following headings-

1) The introduction explaining the need for the new building, its function and what goes on, by departments.

2) General instructions - who will use the service - the very young, the elderly, the disabled. The importance of good natural lighting in public areas and of limited lighting in storage areas. The desirability that those passing along the street should be able to see in, to identify the building. Good public accessibility from street. Carparking.

3) Statistical information - existing population size and future growth. Numbers likely to pass through on an average day and on a Saturday - peak use. Number of volumes to be shelved and number issued.

4) The site - what planning constraints if any are there on the site. Is there a new road planned along its boundary.

5) The pattern of movement of the public in the building - from entrance to charging counter to exit; the space needed for public circulation.

6) The pattern of movement of staff in their routine duty, the space needed department by department, the equipment needed and its size.

7) The pattern or flow of books, from delivery bay to work room - from work room to library shelves. The use of trolleys and lifts. The use of stairs and trolleys.
"horizontal book travel".

8) Temperature control, heating, artificial lighting, noise, views from window, if any.

9) Cost-in-use - surrounds must be limited for easy maintenance. No contract for indoor gardening contemplated, or no full-time caretaker to be appointed.

The Schedule of Requirement will lead to discussions between Architect and Librarian analysing in detail the function of each library department, why a workroom should be close to a charging counter, why an assistant finds it necessary to move from the counter to the workroom, what are the duties of a children's librarian in a children's library and where will she want her desk positioned in relation to the door. Will the Readers' Advisory work be carried out near the charging counter - in the Reference Library - in the Lending Library? What is a Reader's Adviser's work and what tools will be needed within reach. Where will circulatory space be needed? Where and what seating and for how many? What is the pattern for movement for staff and public to the Catalogues and where will these be housed.

When a resulting sketch plan is produced in due time, the right questions must be asked, for example with this scheme -

1. Will the public find their way to the library easily from the street, and having arrived will circulation problems within be easy? Will it be functional, easy and pleasant for staff working?

2. Will the building be flexible, so that change of use will be possible without structural alterations?

3. Can it be extended?

4. Is it compact?

5. Will it come within cost limits.

With an elaborate library this may quite naturally lead to a secondary and more detailed Schedule of Requirement.

By this time, I hope our feet are firmly planted on the ground. We have traced the routines of planning methods, the importance of right sizing of departments, the importance of "traffic flow" studies. Now how important is decoration? How important is the choice of materials and does the architect choose them or the librarian?

To the first question I would say decoration is very important, but the only guidance I have ever felt bold enough to give to an architect is to request him to visualise our libraries as a frame-work for our books. Books give plenty of colour to a library and to my taste bright colours merely distract a reader's thoughts from the browsing that he comes to do. Architects usually have the last word on decoration, and are quite able to invite your presence when wallpapers are selected and then lead you to inspect the library in which quite a different article has been hung. But although this may be rather a shock, if you have briefed your architect well, he will know the relaxed atmosphere that a library needs and combined with a trained eye for effect is, in my view, best left to his own devices. This all seems to me trivial compared with the importance of the correctness of the equipment.

I try to reserve a proportion of the money earmarked for furniture and consult the Architect about tables, chairs and upholstery, but the final choice is my own. The key to those items often lies in the selected flooring. We have experimented with cork flooring, plastic tiles and woodblocks and have returned many times to woodblock floors for several reasons. They are not significantly more expensive than other types, if at all, but they are infinitely more durable. With mechanised polishers they are relatively easy to maintain, and with sanding will be in good condition years after cork and plastic tiles have had to be replaced. Moreover, they are compatible with the

underfloor electric heating which in many part-time libraries has been selected, because it is clean, labour-saving, effective and does not encumber the walls with pipes or radiators. In larger libraries, wall space is not so much at a premium and other factors come into play, and you will find hot air circulating systems as indeed at Stroud.

But a polished wood floor shows off hardwood shelving and wooden furniture and so you will find, except in storage areas, mainly bespoke wooden shelving. Our island shelving is often on castors for flexibility.

Will you find pretty circular libraries in this County? In the schools yes, but not in public library service. It is not really, in my opinion, economic to arrange cube-shaped bookcases in circular buildings, and although I know other authorities claim to have done this successfully, we have never been able here to afford the cost of the unused circulating space. How do you extend circular libraries? Surely extended they would produce some curious shapes.

How about the square shape with the central patio? This, too, has great attractions and can be seen in many counties successfully applied. It was at one stage intended for this building extension in Stroud, but when it came to the crunch we wanted the whole space in the library departments, and could not spare any for a patio.

Perhaps the most important lesson that we have learned is the significance of flexibility and extendability.

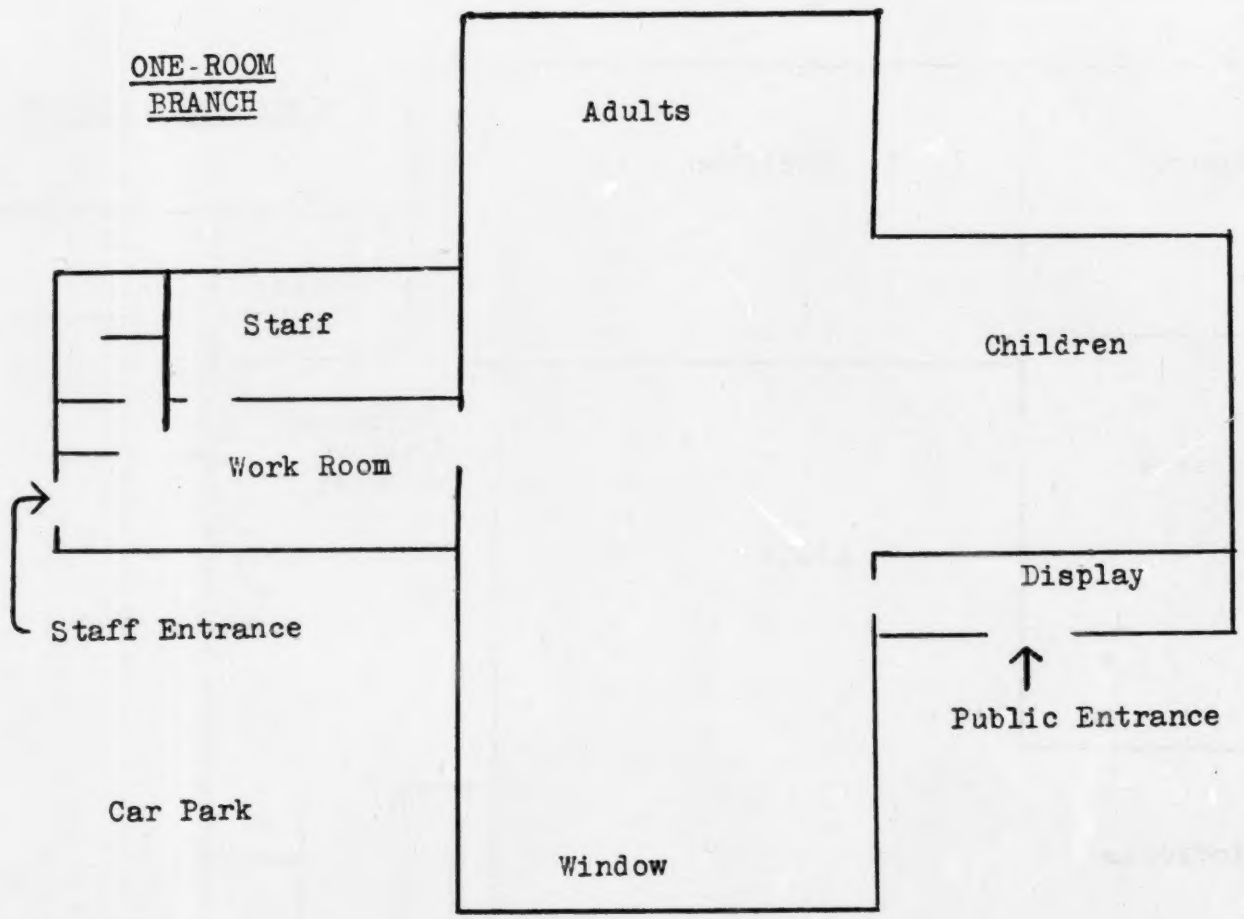
In many of our methods, the county may appear not very forward looking. There are a number of reasons why so far we have not taken to photo-charging, the most important of these is to do with our interest in the application of computer techniques which, in the fullness of time, are bound to come. But the existence of the Browne charging method dictates the present shape and

size of library counters.

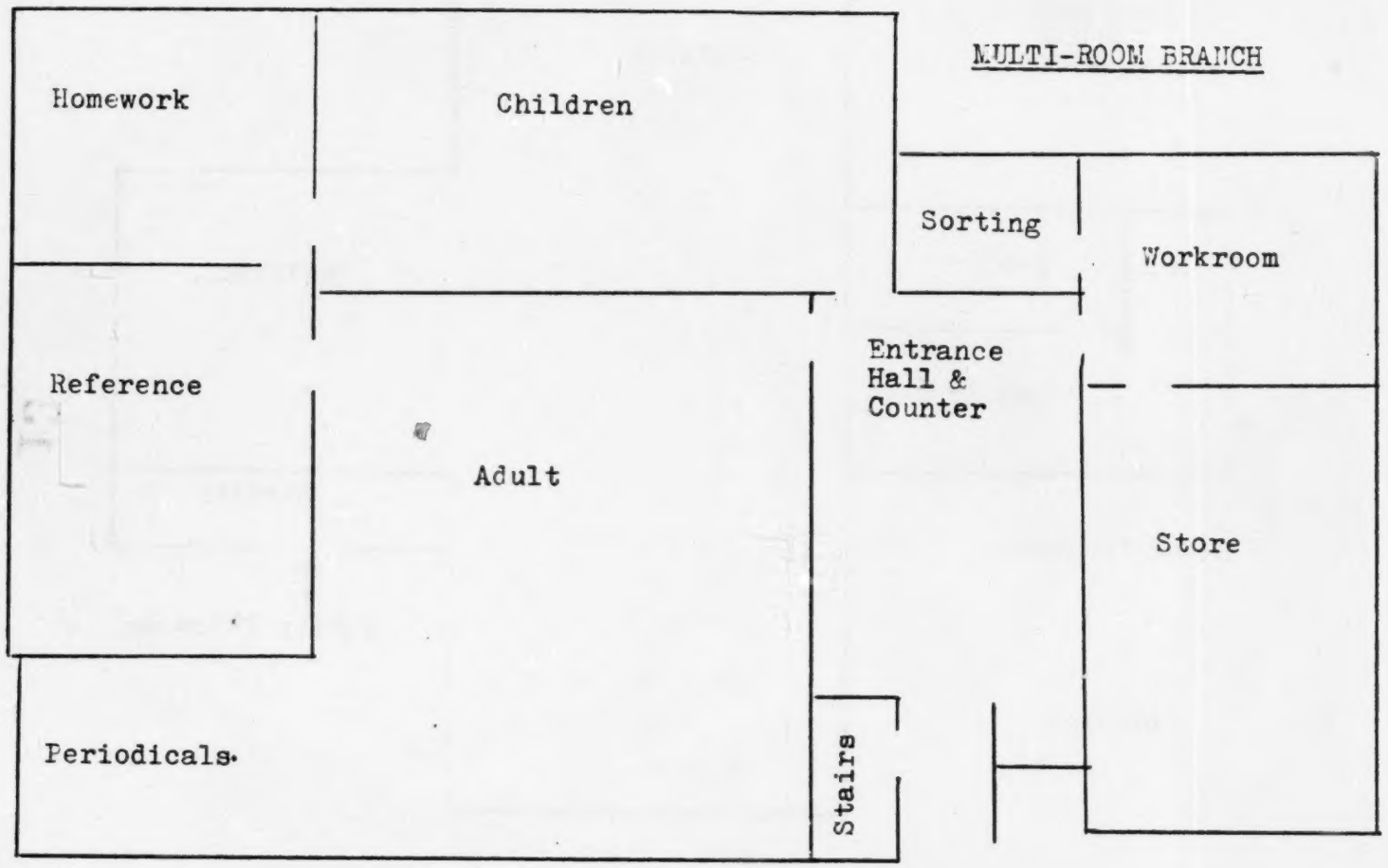
Similarly we still retain Branch catalogues, since these give so much pleasure to our readers, and these, too, still occupy a special place in the new library buildings. But even in the last ten years our ideas of what a library should do or be, have changed enormously and in erecting our buildings, what matters, is that they should be capable of changing in accordance with the readers' changing needs. By adhering as far as possible to a classic simplicity of design, I hope we have been able to achieve this.

Philosophers of librarianship often tell us what we ought to provide but do not pay for these dreams, architects often tell us what we ought to like and we do our best to like, but do not always succeed. In arriving at a choice a librarian is aware of his staff and of the thousands of readers on the sidelines, ready to assess the performance. He cannot hope to please all. In any case he is working within the prescribed limits of his committee's policy, his site, his architect and his budget.

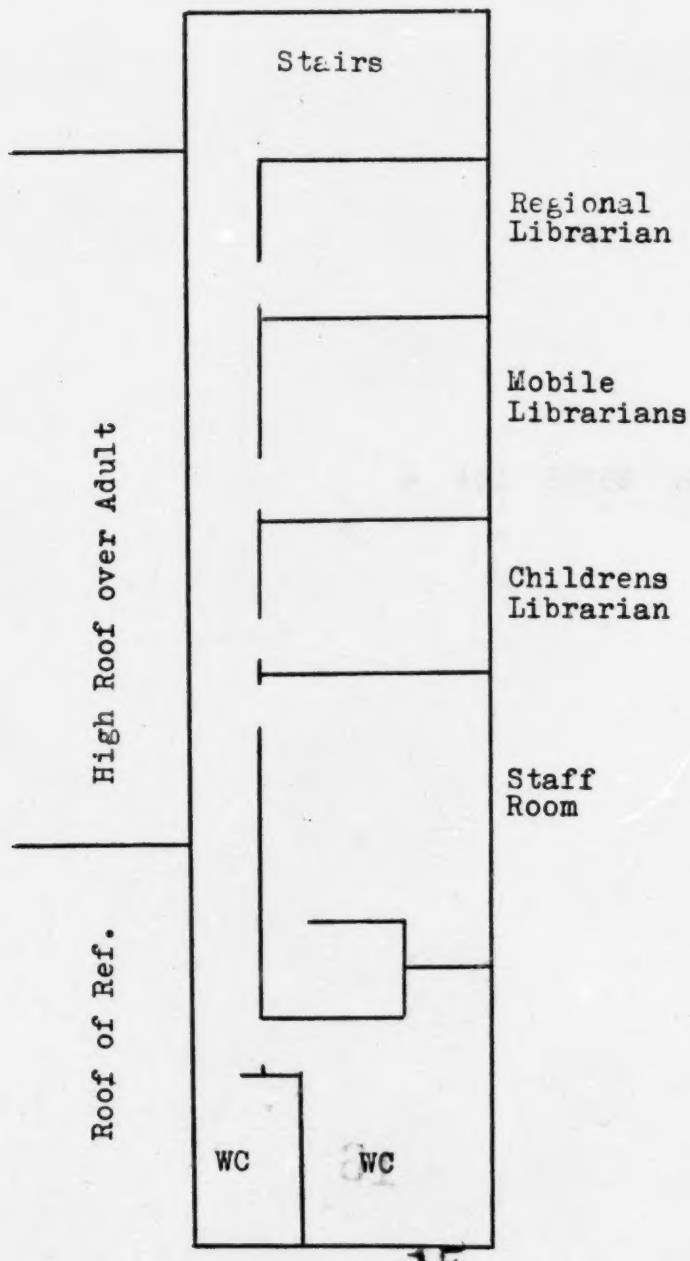
He will, if he is wise, continually consult staff and readers. They, too, have a contribution to make if the new library is to be as good as we would all wish.


ONE-ROOM
BRANCH
Adults
Staff
Children
Work Room
Display
Staff Entrance
Public Entrance
Car Park
Window

MULTI-ROOM BRANCH



MULTI-ROOM BRANCH: UPSTAIRS



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This guide: SBN: 85365 254 6

Printed by H. E. ILES (Central Press) LTD., 49/51 Downend Road, Kingswood, Bristol.